(b) The other steps Government are going to take to minimise the tough and lengthy journey by road from Agartala to Kolkata via Assam?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH) : (a) The Government of India has repeatedly proposed to the Government of Bangladesh to provide facilities for transit of goods and passengers to the north eastern States, including Tripura, The Government of Bangladesh has not yet agreed to grant transit facilities. The Governments of India and Bangladesh have signed an Agreement on 10 July 2001 to start a bus service between Agartala and Dhaka. Discussions are underway with Government of Bangladesh to make the bus service operational. Once it becomes operational passengers travelling from Agartala to Dhaka would be able to proceed to Kolkata through the existing Kolkata-Dhaka bus service.

(b) The road from Agartala to Kolkata (1700 km) passes through the States of Tripura, Assam Meghalaya and West Bengal involving National Highways No.44,40,37,31,31C and 34. The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has launched a programme for the improvement of the riding quality of all the existing National Highways including the highways mentioned above. The improvement of riding quality under this programme is likely to be completed within next 2-3 years. Further, 4 laning of a length of about 616 km of the above mentioned route from Agartala to Kolkata is included in East-West Corridor of National Highway Development Project, which is being implemented by National Highways Authority of India. This project is likely to be completed by December 2007.

Withdrawal of MFN Status to Pakistan

1692. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are considering a proposal to withdraw MFN status to Pakistan in view of the latter's continued support to cross border terrorism against India;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when the decision is likely to be taken and finally announced?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) Government have taken appropriate diplomatic and other measures in view of Pakistan's continued support to cross border terrorism against India. These included the decision to recall the Indian High Commissioner from Islamabad; terminate the services of Samjhauta Express and the Delhi-Lahore bus service with effect from 1st January, 2002; reduce the strength of the respective High Commissions in the two countries by 50%; restrict the movement of those officials and family members who stayed back to the municipal limits of Delhi. India has also handed over to Pakistan a list of 20 fugitives from law with the request that they be apprehended and handed over to India.

President of Pakistan has now made commitments to end cross border infiltration and terrorism on a permanent basis. Government constantly monitors the situation and taken necessary and appropriate action.

Pakistani help to North-Eastern militants

1693. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news report which appeared in the 'Hindustan Times' dated the 29th June, 2002 under the caption "Pervez plays host to North-Eastern militants too";

(b) if so, whether Government have examined this press report; and

(c) if so, what action Government propose to take in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) It is now well established and widely acknowledged that Pakistan has been sponsoring cross border terrorism directed against India, including in the north-east.

(c) Government have taken appropriate diplomatic and other measures. Government have also been effectively bringing to the attention of the international community facts pertaining to Pakistan's continued sponsorship of cross border terrorism in India. The President of Pakistan has made commitments on January 12, May 27 and June 6 to end cross border infiltration on a permanent basis, not allow the territory of Pakistan